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C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 01 OF 02 CHENGDU 000099

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DEPT FOR EAP/CM AND DRL

E.O. 12958: DECL: 6/4/2034
TAGS: [PHUM](#) [PGOV](#) [KPAO](#) [SOCI](#) [CH](#)
SUBJECT: SOUTHWEST CHINA: LOCAL SCHOLAR ON TIANANMEN ANNIVERSARY AND
MEDIA CONTROLS

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CLASSIFIED BY: James A. Boughner, Consul General, U.S. Consulate
General, Chengdu.
REASON: 1.4 (b), (d)

¶1. (C) Summary: Indicating that controls over media in Sichuan Province have notably increased over the past year, a senior-level Sichuan Academy of Social Sciences (SASS) researcher described how Communist Party officials applied additional pressure on him and other independent website editors to regulate postings in the "sensitive period" leading up to the June 4 Tiananmen anniversary. According to our contact, a May 30 article posted on a website founded by detained Sichuan activist Huang Qi accurately describes methods to control dissidents in preparation for June 4. The researcher commented he is optimistic about the online community's skill at eventually finding ways around new controls. End summary.

¶2. (C) Congenoff met recently with a researcher (protect) in the SASS Institute of News and Broadcasting who has been a longtime contact of the Consulate. The researcher was already working at SASS in 1989 and became involved in what he referred to as "the movement," subsequently finding his career prospects significantly diminished. Currently operating a website on which he posts his own writings as well as numerous other articles and items related to media issues, the researcher described how local authorities regularly notify him when they consider particular items on the website to be inappropriate and request that he remove them, which he does.

¶3. (C) According to the researcher, three different organizations contact him about his website's content: the Sichuan CCP Propaganda Department, the section of the Public Security Bureau (PSB) that handles the Internet, and a Communication Affairs (tongxun shiwu) office. He maintains contact with media scholars in Taiwan and Hong Kong, at times posting material from them, but notes his e-mail communications often do not go through. When he has a particularly sensitive piece he wants to post, he does not highlight it on his homepage but buries it elsewhere on the site in order to at least delay the subsequent requests for removal. He emphasized that he is not trying to be "anti-government," but rather is simply promoting an open forum for discussion on media development.

Tightened Controls

¶4. (C) Discussing recent trends, the scholar noted an overall increase in central control over reporting on political issues and a corresponding decline in the "reputation" of the media. Responding to a question about the openness of Sichuan's media relative to media in Guangdong Province, the researcher noted that several years ago Sichuan media had been more open and

willing to write controversial stories, but now the scope of coverage in Sichuan has narrowed. Control over the media has increased considerably during the past year, both in Sichuan and more widely throughout China, with the impetus coming from the very top of the political system. Restrictions on reporting on economic issues, however, are an exception in that they seem less than previously.

15. (C) In light of growing official assertion of media controls in 2009, the researcher does not see many prospects for Sichuan mainstream media to become more open. He highlighted, however, the role that media in south China, such as Nanfang Zhoumo (Southern Weekend), can play in serving as a potential model. (Note: According to some of our local press contacts, one example of tighter controls in recent years was an early 2008 order from the central government closing the "international departments" of all Sichuan television stations and requiring them to rely on the national wire service (Xinhua) for coverage of almost any story with a foreign angle. Some contacts have told us that interviews involving foreign nationals are sometimes done just for "practice," as final approval to air such stories is always a big question mark. End note).

16. (C) The researcher remains optimistic, nevertheless, about the trend toward free information exchange in the broader media environment. He emphasized the Internet is where most cutting edge material on media issues and other sensitive topics gets published, particularly on academic sites. Many more opinions are being expressed these days, including political satire and other critiques, even if it is not showing up in traditional print media. The Internet is leading traditional media due to the tight restrictions remaining on the latter. The researcher emphasized the relative freedom of publication on the Internet, despite frequent deletion of posted content.

17. (C) The researcher described a meeting he was recently

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required to attend, along with other independent website editors, where local Party officials instructed them to submit all materials to their "superiors" for review prior to posting. He did not know whether the orders to call the meeting came from provincial or national level Party organs. Acknowledging that the meeting was likely connected to the Tiananmen 20th anniversary, the researcher said he would not agree to follow the new instructions. He emphasized his site is his own private independent effort, and that it would be inappropriate for his SASS bosses to get involved in editing its contents. Further, implementation would likely prove both impractical and burdensome. He does not believe other website editors are following the policy either. The researcher continues to remove material when asked, but noted there had been no specific follow up by Party officials following the meeting.

18. (C) Commenting on broader policies to control information dissemination related to June 4, the researcher emphasized the ongoing long-term back and forth between government measures and skillful "netizens," with the latter always finding a way around new controls. He remarked that a May 30 article posted on the independent website 64tianwang, "As June 4 approaches, the secrets of the CCP's new measures to monitor dissidents is revealed," describes accurately for the most part control strategies utilized by government authorities.

Note on 64tianwang

19. (SBU) The site 64tianwang was founded by Huang Qi, a Sichuan-based human rights activist arrested in June 2008 for reportedly assisting parents investigating school collapses during the earthquake. Huang Qi remains in detention, and 64tianwang.com is currently hosted overseas and blocked in China. Some of the specific measures allegedly in use, as described in the above-referenced article, include the closing down of all university-affiliated "baidu tiebas" (online user-run search-based forums at Baidu.com) in late May;

deploying student Party members to spy on instructors; closing down selected sensitive websites and increasing management of postings at others; strengthened text messaging and phone conversation monitoring using newly developed keyword and voice recognition software; use of new web blocking technologies that weaken proxy server capacity; and the use of viruses distributed via e-mails from senders posing as friends in order to access activists' e-mail boxes.

BOUGHNER